







## FOREWORD

I am happy to be allowed the privilege ~~to add a~~ few words to this excellent study of the history of Culture & Civilization of Sumatra, (said to have derived its name from the word 'Samudra'—Sumudra—Sumutra—Sumatra). The author of this volume Swami Sadananda Giri is an enthusiastic student of the culture of Greater India and has visited and studied its monuments with love and admiration and is anxious to infuse his enthusiasm and interest in this fascinating field of Indianistic culture into the hearts of his brother Indians. He has written a series of articles in the newspapers and journals giving very interesting descriptions of the religious and artistic culture of Siam, Java, and Cambodia.

In this little volume he has made an excursion into a little known, and for that account, a very fascinating field of Indonesian Culture. It is believed by some scholars that Sumatra rather than Java was the original focus and centre of expansion of Indian civilization in Indonesia, while others believe that the centre of Indonesian culture was at Caiya (Jaya = Sri-vijaya) in the Malaya State.

In fact upto about the ninth century—Indian Culture was spread over an unified Java-Sumatra-

Malay complex—having its cultural and political centre of gravity in the famous Sailendra Empire of Sri-vijaya, located either in Sumatra or in Lower Siam.

The records of the Song dynasty and Liang dynasty of China afford very interesting though tantalizing glimpses of the state of things in Sumatra *before* the rise of the Sailendra Kings, who were devoted patrons of Buddhism. The kings ruling in Sumatra before the sixth century were Hindu-Brahminical in names and beliefs as appear to be suggested by the records of embassies sent from Sumatra to China—"In the reign of the Emperor Hiao-Wou of the Song dynasty (454-464) the king of the country *Che-p'o-lo-na-lien-t'o* (Srivara-narendra) sent a high official of the name of *Tchou Lien-t'o* (Rudra, the Indian) to present valuable articles of gold and silver." After the death of this king his son P'i-ye-po-mo (Vijayavarman) sent to China his ambassador named Pi-yuan-po-mo (Vijana-Varman?). About this time Sumatra, or some part of it was known as Kandari or Kandali (in Chinese transcription—*Kan-t'o-li*).

It is a well known fact—that the earlier waves of Indian Colonization in further India were Hinduistic in colour and texture and the later currents were predominantly Buddhistic—in all parts of Indonesia.

When Fa-hien visited Java (in 413 A.D.) he found so few Buddhists "that it is not worth while to mention them". It was the visit of Gunavarman the exiled prince of Kashmir (c. 424 A.D.) which gave the impetus of the growth of Buddhist Culture in Java, Sumatra, and other places. So that when Yi-tsing visited Śrî-vijaya (671-672 A.D.) he was amazed at the learning of the Buddhist priests of the place. In fact within a few years, Sumatra became the most famous centre of Buddhist learning and no Buddhist priest could be said to have completed his education unless he had studied at this important centre of Buddhist theology. The famous Indian monk, Atisa otherwise called Dipaṅkara-Śrîjñāna of the Vikramśîlā monastery of Bihar spent ten years in Sumatra in order to complete his studies in the pure doctrine of the *Sarvāstivādins* under Ācārya Candrakîrti, the High Priest of Suvarṇadvîpa.

In fact for several centuries India and Sumatra were in close and intimate contact. And it is alluring to study this cultural unity in the ancient remnants of the monuments of Sumatra and in the written records of Chinese history. It is a long forgotten and lost page of Indian history that Swami Sadananda recovers for us in this interesting booklet.

He was inspired to study Indonesian culture in all its phases by Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and it

is a matter of great gratification that his studies are based on direct contact and experience derived from visits to that great island. It is to be hoped that this book will help to revive interest in a resumption of social and spiritual relation with the inhabitants of Sumatra—who can justly claim to be near kinsmen of Indians—through a common heritage of Culture which has been the glory of India and of Indonesia.

Grateful acknowledgements are due to the Dutch Resident and Soetan Mangaradja Pintar of Goenoengtoca (Padang Lawas) for courteous facilities given to Swami Sadananda to visit and study the Biara Temple. The Indian Merchants' Association at Medan have earned cordial thanks by their kind help and hospitality without which the Swami's sojourn to Sumatra would not have been possible.

Mr. K. C. De, has taken considerable pains in carefully revising the manuscript of the author and in giving it a literary form which testifies to his ability as a scholar of singular distinction.

In reading through the proofs Mr. Salil Kumar Banerjee M.A., B.L., has rendered valuable help of which it is a pleasure to record our acknowledgment.

O. C. GANGOLY

2, Ashutosh Mukherjee Road,  
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## SUVARNADWIPA

Among the world's islands, Sumatra, claims to be one of the big five. She has an area of 180,000 sq. miles. The mountain cord, which precipitates sharply towards the West Coast, traverses the island axially and temporizes the rigours of a tropical climate. There are some active craters and the Mt. Ophir, one of the volcanic peaks (which perhaps lent its name to a coastal town from where King Solomon's traders used to collect bullion) reaches a height of 10,000 feet. The northern half of the island which lies above the Equator stretches almost parallel to the south-eastern-most projection of the mainland on the other side of the Straits of Malacca, so that Selensing (Shailendrasingha?), the peninsular settlement of the Hindus lay, *via* Singapore (Tumasik), within an easy compass of Jambi and Palembang (Srivijaya), the Aryan colonies on Sumatra. The plains slope gently towards the east and are watered by a number of rivers navigable enough for largish boats



## *SUVARNADWIPA*

to penetrate into inland areas, where areca-nuts, cocoanuts, coffee, indigo, maize, palm-trees, rice, rubber, spices, sugarcane, tea and tobacco are produced in plenty. Gold and copper mines there might have been, but were long exhausted.

Of the aborigines the Achines in the north, deserve a mention for their sturdy opposition to the Dutch; courageous, obdurate and of a nomadic inclination, they love to roam about unrestrained, their means of livelihood being chiefly hunting wild animals. They were conversant with fire-arms before the Dutch came, but are still primitive in agricultural pursuits. Their features suggest a strong negroid element, but their height is against their being classed with the pygmy races of the Andamans and elsewhere.

The Bataks attract, however, the notice of many travellers for several reasons. Their land, which lies in the centre, around the shores of the Lake Toba and its island of Samosir, was inaccessible from the north for centuries. There is a reference of a Chinese trader exploring into their wild haunts in the 17th Century and the next representative of a civilised race to reach them was Dr. Van der Tuuk in 1863 A.D. These Bataks had an evil reputation of being canni-



Batak girl



balistic and the Dutch had to exert authority to make them give up this horrible propensity which persisted upto the first decade of the present century. Moreover where there were no roads but foot-tracks, which were often lost in the dense tropical jungle there are today fine motor-highways leading from Medan right down to Padang *via* Sibloga. But we are perhaps some of the very few Indians who have so far ventured into the Batakland in the modern era. The trip is a lovely one for its everchanging panorama of gorgeous mountains, canyons and thickly-wooded passes where some of the hair-pin bends almost take the breath away and can be only negotiated by a driver accustomed to them. The beautiful lake Toba with its large island of Samosir entrenched all round by sky-reaching trees that grow on high hills is really a fine recompense for the trouble we take to reach the Batak haunts

These people who are divided into four groups owing to their dialectal differences are of a Proto-Malayan stock, which originally migrated from Cambodia through Malay and on its arrival at Sumatra, it fused a good deal with negroid early-settlers. That they came later into at least indirect contact with the Aryans can be guessed from the

presence of a number of Sanskrit words like Guru, Devata etc., as well as from certain images of Hindu worship. Whether on the decline of the Aryan influence they reverted or not to the man-eating trait of their negrito forbears on one hand and to animism with their curiously blended devotion to spirits and ancestors derived from their Indonesian parents on the other, we leave to the researches of ethnographers, but the revival of this awful characteristic might have been indirectly fomented by a degenerated cult of the Mahayana Tantrists.

Yet, save and except this savage trait, the Bataks preserves many indications of a highly-evolved culture. Their agricultural methods, cattle-breeding (Batak horses are famous in the island), house-building, iron weapons, copper ornaments, brass lamps, silver trinkets, decorated bamboo utensils, baked and glazed pottery and intricate wood-carvings, all prove that they attained a remarkable standard of living unnoticed among other savages. Perhaps the Arab traders were responsible for the introduction of rifles and gun-powder and some of the Bataks are so intimately conversant with the fire-arm mechanism that they often undertake and execute creditable repair works.

Rice is their staple food, which they cultivate in abundance on the upland with implements mostly made of bamboo. Sharpened bamboo sticks are used in digging up the ground into clods, which are crushed into fine dust by heavy flails. A cleft bamboo pocket is utilised for spreading seeds into the rectangular plots furrowed with the help of a hand-plough. The only iron tool used in agriculture is the sharp scythe needed for reaping the crop. Though bullocks or buffaloes are seldom employed on the farmland yet methods used in stamping paddy are the same as in Bengal. After the whole process is completed, the grain is gathered into picturesque barns built close to one's house.

Residential quarters are often large enough to hold as many as eight families. Houses (which served as forts in old days) are raised three to six feet above the ground by means of poles driven into brick piles; heavy cross-bars wedged into these poles support the wooden frame-work of the plastered wall, which is tastefully decorated with exquisite carvings and coloured wicker-weave. The entrance to the house is often marked by gable fronts holding up artistically thatched roofs where camel-hump tops end in crescents of shaded animal-horns. The access to

the house is gained by a staircase (built underneath) leading through a trap-door in the flooring of the stranger's or the bachelor's room. There is sometimes a verandah-like projection of bamboo, which serves as a platform to musicians on festive occasions. A sewer runs through the house, on either side of which are kitchens with stone slabs for ovens fitted with racks for holding bamboo utensils. These are differently sized cylinders which serve the Bataks as receptacles for cooking, storing and eating food as well as tumblers for drinking. Other furnitures of household utility are rare.

The fabric for wear is made by the people with cotton grown in their own country. Here the art of weaving and the mechanism employed in producing cloth vary little from what are in vogue in other eastern countries. Gut-string bows twang monotonously as ginned cotton fly about into fleece and spinning wheels groan unceasingly as they transform the staple into yarns amidst the gossips of women. Looms can be handled deftly by both sexes and dyes that are utilised in staining the fabric are obtained from vegetable origin like indigo; only some of the printed dress-materials are perhaps obtained from foreign countries.

Women affect large head-gears of coloured cloth in a peculiar style; these are either pinned to their hair with silver clasps and are adorned with large beads or are worn in a curious knot. Their ear-rings are enormous; these are generally made of copper but now and again silver pendants are seen too. The more affluent have gold necklets called 'Brahmanis', from which it is not difficult to guess the source of their inspiration. The fair sex may adorn their waist with silver girdles but children who seldom cover their body generally have a thin precious metal girdle round their stomach. The 'Punjabi' looking long shirts which men put on in addition to their sarongs are sometimes bedecked with pieces of looking-glasses and their head-covers have the appearance of a 'pugrie' without a tail. Some of the men-folk put on wickered hats to protect themselves against the hot sun while working in the field. It is the turban of the priest or the witch doctor, which has a sanctified bearing, because of its being a gift from their common legendary ancestor Singamangraja.

The Bataks were a fighting race before they settled under the Dutch to the more peaceful life. Slings, lances with sharp copper tips, bows, arrows, guns, powder-pouches, and caribou hide small shields

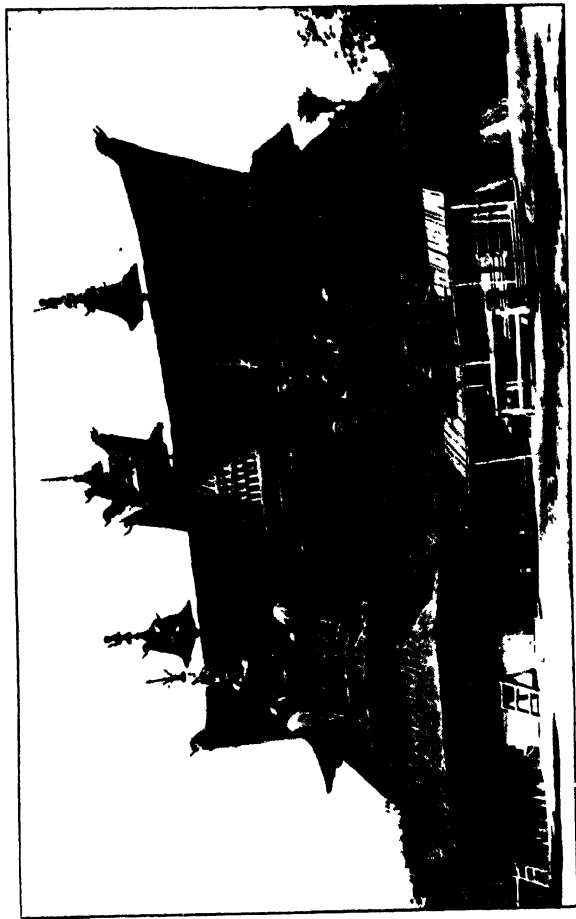


were their usual paraphernalia of war. Chiefs carried ivory-handled swords and knives while the underlords displayed copper-hilted daggers. Generals held batons blessed by clan-gurus for the extermination of enemies whereas common soldiers carried charmed amulets for protection against the foe's poisoned darts. Sometimes heavy wooden maces were used in hand-to-hand engagements and the village approach was 'mined' with fine bamboo spikes hidden in the grass to arrest the progress of the invading army who generally were bare-footed. As an ordinary protective measure high mud-walls were built as ramparts round the village.

Fishing, both as a sport and as a living, is indulged in by the Bataks, who live close to such expanses of water as the Lake Toba. Light canoes, made out of hollowed palm trunks, are manned by fishermen, and these look like some saurians with a raised hood. Hooks and lines are sometimes resorted to, but mostly nets are cast to land a big haul. Women have light landing nets and some of the tribes use long sharp knives to finish the capture, while in water.

Deer-hunting and pig-sticking (with the help of a pointed bamboo lance) often prove so interesting to Batak adults that they spend most of the day in

*Suvarnadwipa*



B Ho



jungles. They often lay traps both for aquatic and land games which, however, are not very ingenious.

The Bataks certainly love music, for, their orchestra consists of gongs, drums, flutes, anklongs, violins and queer looking mandolins which are mostly attuned to strange forms of snake-dances which include writhing motions of the entire body while hands and legs twist into curious figures. Mouth organs are left to lovers who serenade their lady-loves in their off-hours while billets-doux are composed on decorated bamboo cylinders. Children play with pop-guns, tops and balls woven with rattan-strips whereas the adults amuse themselves with games of dice and chess; card-playing probably appears unknown to them. Their common beverage is palm-toddy, which they drink out of bamboo cups. Deli tobacco is available to them but opium-smoking (with Chinese-looking pipes and lighters) has had a check under the Dutch.

Drugs are generally made of crude vegetable syrups and love potions are not unknown either. Gurus probably had a thriving income from magic or charmed drinks, which were supposed to do almost impossible things, but these have diminished

owing to missionary work, who have done great services to the community by erecting a leper asylum.

The Bataks are now being converted to Christianity but they still display their liking for animism and ancestor-worship imbibed from their forefathers. The Hindu Gods are revered but spirits that are supposed to live in desolate places are feared and protection against their evil-doing is sought through priestcraft. How far they are under the moral persuasion of their witch doctors and gurus it would be hard to gauge, but among superstitious people there is always a tendency to revert to their old ideas at the slightest contretemps, and the Batak Christians are no exception.

They used to bury their dead, exhume the bodies after a while, burn the same with a show of pomp and collect the ashes in an iron vessel which they would send floating down the mid-stream. This alone did not constitute their respect for the dead and it is our belief that they copied a good deal the festivities of a Buddhist funeral and there must have been some elaborate ceremonies connected with the worship of the dead which are now lost to us.

On the shore of the Lake Toba there is a place called Prapat, which, if of Sanskrit origin, would

mean water fall The trip to Sibloga is indeed very pleasant from scenic point of view but to us the Padang high lands, where the Minangkabau race has its abode was naturally more attractive. We were shown courteously by Mr. G. Hoetagaloeng a resident of this beautiful coast town Sibloga. As we were in a hurry we had to refuse with thanks his hospitality. Fort-de-Kock is one of the Dutch built clean towns which has a military base and the air-route from Pakan Baroe may be reached from here by road. This Pakan Baroe has some Hindu relics which would be of great interest to the historian but at present they require proper cataloguing.

To judge precisely how far the physiographical conditions of Sumatra have affected ethnic distribution and localisation, or to celebrate how far racial complexities have been somatically temporized and intellectually altered would be extremely difficult and there is always a possibility of a grave error in the final verdict, unless corroboration from an independent source is available. We know, when in a pre-historic era Sumatra formed a connected mass with the mainland of Asia, migration was easy and a number of races might have settled and some of these early settlers

might have, for reasons unknown, altogether disappeared from the face of the globe. Lower Siam and Malay have traces of lithic evolution in almost all phases; yet so far we have not been put into possession of any stone-age evidences, which are likely to indicate any particular period of the pre-historic human occupation of this island. What we have at our disposal, however, are so unique that we hardly know which race to connect them with. We refer to the stone effigies of the Batoe Sankar caves. Could cave-man possibly execute such fine details on stone as these display? What tribe of men do they represent? Large heads are covered with closely clipped curled hair, which remains clear off the wide foreheads; eyes bulge on either side of pug-noses, under which thick lips part in an expression of wonder or horror; flat but largish ears from which enormous pendants (or flowers?) hang against flabby cheeks; necks are short while backs are bent forward under a heavy burden, so much so that shoulders are propped up against it; yet hands are held akimbo with both palms folded together; a posture which would remind a modern of the cringing hawker, who would be just pleased to get rid of his heavy stock at the first opportunity.



Minangkabau girl





The same puzzle, but to a less degree, presents itself to us, when we attempt to trace the evolutionary history of all aborigines, specially of the Bataks and the Minangkabaus. The former according to some ethnographers, represents an earlier mixture of the Proto-Negroids and the Proto-Australoids, yet their reverence for the dead and their worship of spirits and ancestors would link them culturally with the Mongoloids. The Minangkabaus, who certainly migrated from the maritime regions of Chekiang and Fukien, passed through Malay where a number of them settled down and fused with the Polynesian Mon-khmers, while the rest gained access to Central Sumatra *via* east-coast rivers. Hence arose the legend of the Minangkabau's being the parent-tribe of the Malayans, to which the fact that the Hindu Shailendras hailed first from Palembang to dominate over the Srivijaya empire of the Peninsula lent an impressive colouring. The Minangkabaus have not only retained their Mongoloid eyes and flattened noses but have preserved much of the animistic and the Spirit worshipping traditions of the ancient Oceanians in spite of their being converted to Islamism. They are tall and the women-folk possess a majestic mien which renders them comparable to the women

of modern Turkey and not to their Borkha-covered Indian sisters who are lost behind the labyrinth of the seraglio. There has been much speculation regarding the Minangkabaus; they lived much closer to the Aryan settlers yet the Hindu influence on them is less felt than on the Bataks; also their queer matriarchal structure of society bespeaks of their isolation from the outer world at a certain stage of evolution for a considerable while. Woman rules the hearth and hers is the only voice that is authoritative on any question of social affairs. The house which has a similar appearance to that of the Bataks but less artistic is really a barrack of married women, whose husbands may come and visit the inmates but must not make a long stay. Property devolves on woman while man has just a pittance in the form of a small share in his own family heirlooms. These latter are, however, kept under the surveillance of the oldest male member of the family. A man has no opinion to offer on the marriage of his own children, but will be listened to when his sister asks for his advice on her children's affairs. His physical superiority has left agriculture, house-building, cattle-tending etc. to him and while he plays on flutes or violins a batch of women will dance to the tune, gorgeously attired; their festival head-gears have

the look of similar bonnets affected by the 16th century European women, while their embroidered Sarongs with heavy waist bands are probably an imitation of the court dress of the Shailendra ladies.

The Dutch authorities complain that none of the tribes of Sumatra, owing to the extreme fertility of soil, would work more than it is necessary for raising sufficient crop for annual consumption. As they are too indolent, the benign Hague government was forced to sanction the importation of the Javanese and the Chinese coolies for intensive as well as extensive agriculture. For large-scale production a certain amount of nigger-driving is essential, which, when it is based on legal contracts between capital and labour, is supposed to rush the output and the wage-earning indexes to a higher level. The ethics or the psychological effects of the system are much the same, be it instituted in Assam tea-gardens, Korean condensed milk factories, New Orleans cotton areas or in European mines. There is nothing to grumble at, for, is it not natural to expect adequate returns for initial outlays and current expenses in any organisation? The Dutch system has all the ameliorative features of the present day labour control ideas. There are doctors to attend the invalid; clean food and

healthy barracks along with regular wages leave little for criticism. The want of philosophic calm on the part of the worker is perhaps responsible for their non-observance of disciplinary action of the authority.

The aborigines being dealt with in our rapid survey of Sumatra, we may now be allowed to speak a few words on the activities of a third race which created an unprecedented glamour whether in the West or in the East and which like those of the ancient Egyptians are now reduced to a few stone inscriptions and monuments. How they came to settle down at Jambi or Palembang and thence to Selensing we can only guess, but spread they did, not only intellectually and culturally, but politically as well, in all the islands of the archipelago and the South-eastern Asia which to-day is better described as Further or Greater India. They were the Aryans, who came from all parts of India but the Dakshinapatha contributed perhaps a larger share in colonisation and perforce enjoyed a larger return from commerce. In the following lines we shall just give a few dates chronologically arranged so that it may develop into a well-linked story of the past. There are records of events but identification of places and persons is extremely difficult.



Mahakala  
(By courtesy of Netherlands Indies



Not to speak of old chroniclers who perhaps never stirred out of their home, even traders who actually visited distant lands display a deplorable lack of knowledge regarding their accurate geographic situation. Men in those days loved to indulge in hyperboles and had a picturesque, but extremely vague manner of describing places and people, which often gives rise to serious confusion as to their identification in our age of precision. Dynastic designations and often personal styles of the monarch were made to denote the realm he ruled. The Empire of the Maharaja in the ancient days stood for the Hindu domination in the Further India but the Si-li-ma-ha-la of the Chinese records of 1424 A.D. referred to the third Sultan of Malacca. Thus the source, the nationality of the writer and the period all have to be carefully sifted before we are able to piece together the fragments of long-forgotten incidents into history. The classical instance that of the Srivijaya in the Far-East, which, were it not for the indefatigable researches of M. Coedes would still be passed over as the name of a ruler. Yet San-bo-tsai, Shi-li-fo-She Zabaj, Sarbaza etc., all hinted at the great empire which probably had its first nucleus in the territory round Palembang in Suvarnadwipa. We may cite a host of references



to this Srivijaya relating to the activities of her several sovereigns and her final exit from the history of the World, but we have to maintain silence without further authoritative collation as to what preceded her, whether the Shailendras were her actual founders or they merely extended for eight hundred years a brilliant programme of some equally glorious ancestors. Many are the allusions to her sister island of Java, some of which at least could be applicable to her with greater truth, specially when she lies closer to the Indo-Chinese trade-route round the straits of Malacca. Possibly the Buddhist monks hesitated to visit her, who still retained her Hindu beliefs and liked still less to make any mention of her in their memoranda. This can be judged from the fact that as soon as Sumatra changed her religious ideals to the principles of Lord Tathagata we find the Chinese visiting and describing her at length.

It would be therefore a pure speculation, for example, to say that Sumatra was definitely mentioned as Suvarnabhumi in the Ramayana. It would be contested that the original work of Valmiki contained no reference to her. At the same time, if Ophir, the gold-exporting town, could be identified beyond doubt with any port on the east coast of



Statue of a female  
Padang Lawas  
(By courtesy of Netherlands Indies  
*Archæological Service*)



Sumatra, from where bullion, ivory, apes (kapim) and peacocks (tukim) went to the court of the king Solomon, we could definitely assert that this island came under the cultural sway of the Aryans at least in 1000 B.C. That the Hindus often embarked on ocean-borne enterprise, whether for the greed of gold or from a sheer spirit of adventure, may be substantiated by the Rigveda which happens to be much older composition than the Chapter on the wealthiest Hebrew king in the Old Testament. In 414 A.D. there is no doubt that Fa-hien was marooned in Ya-vadi, for he says so. Yet the Sumatra coast was within a shorter reach of his boat than Java. If the tempest had abated and allowed a smooth voyage probably he would have never missed his visit to Java, where only the Brahmans flourished. Just as much as Yuen Chwang had little to say except paint Sasamka in the deepest black, Fa-hien was too down-hearted at the fewness of co-religionists. Within a decade of his departure, Gunavarman, an ex-prince of Kashmir, renounced his crown for monk's bowl, and came to convert the people of Cho-po to Hinayanism. Either the older religion of Java was fast losing its grip over the people or this Kashmiri was a good theologian, for, he soon converted enough people to have left the

place, apparently satisfied with his work, for China, where, in Nanking, he died in 429 A.D. It is however certain that Hinduism held its own in Sumatra during the 5th century, which it continued to do for another hundred years at least.

By 671 A.D. both the Buddhist Schools had established themselves in Sumatra; from a Malayan inscription of 684 A.D., we are able to gather that the Vajrayana Buddhism was already prevalent among the Srivijaya rulers of Sumatra, and the Mahayanists from the start seemed to have captured Melayu under the guidance of one Dharmapala, but their Tantrism did not effloresce until the advent of Wajrabodhi in 711 A.D. Of him, we only know that he was a Dakshini Vikshu and came to Sumatra on a Persian boat. The Mulasaraswatiwadanikaya School, to which our diarist I-tsing belonged, must have won the heart of the mass, while the Mahayana creed remained a court cult. Sumatra possessed good Sanskrit scholars or I-tsing could not have gained enough proficiency in grammar in six months and proceeded to take up a ten-years course at the University of *Nalanda*, where the 108 Dwarapanditas must have severely tested his knowledge, before he could reach the innermost circle. On his way to Tamralipti he visited all the

Malayan ports of the Srivijaya and it was not until 685 A.D. that he could regain Sumatra. He spent another four years in copying probably all the available sacred treatises, but the task was too great for one man. He went to China and returned to Sumatra in 691 A.D. with four compatriots to help him in writing up the religious tracts of the island and in 711 A.D. long after he had found his way back to the land of his forefathers, he translated the Hastananda Shastra of Sakyakirti, one of the twelve erudite scholars of his day who could be classed with *Inanabhadra* of Java.

The Mahayana Tantrism was really given a strong impetus by one of the Pala kings of Bengal. That there was a close spiritual alliance between Bengali Buddhists and their Sumatran brothers could be first gleaned from the fact that on the 21st Day of Kartika of the 39th year of Devapaladeva, son of Paramasaugata Sri Dharmapaladeva, granted five villages for the upkeep of a certain monastery near Nalanda at the request of Balaputradeva, the ruler of the Golden Isle, whose mother, Tara was the daughter of Dharmasetu of Java. It is possible to infer from Kalasan inscription (778 A.D.) that the father of this Balaputradeva was one Panangkran, who

showed enough military ability to be described as Samaragra, in which case, Sanjaya, whose arms all his neighbours felt, would be the paternal grandfather of Balaputradeva. Tara was certainly the wife of Panangkran and Dharmasetu of Keluraka and Kalasan petrographs was a Mahayanist Buddhist but beyond the fact that Dharmapala and Dharmasetu were almost contemporaneous, nothing further should be deduced. To make him a Pala monarch of Bengal so that Devapaladeva and Balaputradeva could be cousins would be stretching imagination a little too far. Because Dharmasetu claims his descent from the lunar race, there is no reason to believe that he was a Kshattriya, in whom only the Kuru blood flowed. It is an epithet which should be taken at its face-value, that is to say, it is an adjunct to glorify the race from which the donor Balaputradeva had sprung. The name 'Tara' itself is suggestive of the host of gods and goddesses that built up the Mahayanist cosmogony, which on the decline of Buddhism came to be included in the Dasamahavidya of the Saktas. From the date of the Bengal Pala ruler, we may deduce that Balaputradeva ruled in Sumatra sometimes in the middle of the ninth century A.D.

The year 980 A.D. saw the birth of one of the most learned Bengali, whose profound knowledge of the esoteric doctrines of Buddhism made him the head of the Nalanda University; while the Tibetan authorities held out invitations to him more than once to visit their land, Sumatra expressed her greatest desire to see him among the flowers of her Mahayana School. He may be a mere name to-day in Bengal, which has to secure materials from Nepal, Tibet and Palembang to write a biography of this great scholar, but he is still revered in countries where the Tantric School of the Buddhists continues to draw votaries to its fold. Atisha Sri-Jnana Dipamkara was probably born at Vajrayogini when the Mahayana cult had its exponents all over the Gangetic delta. His exceptional abilities marked him out from his youth and his fame soon spread outside Bengal as one of the greatest exponents of the secret teachings of certain Buddhist monks, who were more or less responsible for the conceptions such as Avalokitesvara, Hariti, Tara and a crowd of Buddhist gods and goddesses in spite of the fact that in the system of Lord Buddha God Himself had no place.

Dharmakirti, who according to a Nepalese Punthi, was a Sumatran prince and was initiated into



the Mahayana Tantrism by Sri Ratna at Bodh-Gaya, went back to his country and soon achieved the highest position among the Sumatran monks. On arrival of Dipamkara, he showed this Bengali monk all the courtesy due to his vast knowledge and probably it was the latter who taught some of the most hidden practices of Tantra to the Sumatran monks. If it were otherwise, Dharmakirti's, and not Dipamkara's name would have been engraved on Sangklion plate, which probably served as a memorial tablet to the figure of Yamari (the enemy of Death) with eight hands, twenty-four eyes and vested with a garland of human skulls hanging around the neck. It would appear perhaps revolting to the present aesthetic notions of the civilised world, just as much as the figure of Amoghapasa at Padang Chandi or the Mahakalamurti of the same place would create unsympathetic comments from 'nice-minded' people. In the inscription of Amoghapasa too, the name of Dipamkara appears which shows that he still lived in the memory of the Sumatrans just a few years before the Sri-vijayas were swept off by the continuous attacks of the Bilwa Tikta monarch.

The figure of Amoghapasa deserves our attention for a moment. It is really a conception of the



Vishnu—Srivijaya  
(By courtesy of Netherlands Indies  
Archæological Service)



Adyasakti with her attendants or Yoginis who form the chakra with her. She represents destruction in the sense that creation follows immediately from annihilation; in early Buddhist idea, birth and rebirth move in a cycle and metempsychosis is the direct outcome of karma and only ceases with it, when the greatest of mental conceptions, Nirvanam, is attained. The rites that came to be connected with the Tantrism, one of which was necessarily the construction of a concrete thought-form like Amoghapasa, were all, not single one excepted, primarily and fundamentally related to certain yogic practices necessary for setting mind free from the trammels of materialistic thoughts. The gruesome aspect of the whole science of the Tantric worship disappears, when all words apparently related to gross and horrid things are given their true meanings which only the initiated have the right to know when they prove themselves, after severe tests free from all carnal thoughts. Hence when we learn from the inscription at the back of the statue of Adityavarman, (perhaps one of the last Shailendras of Sumatra) that the Lord of Matangini is removing her loneliness, it is not to sexual pleasure which is alluded to. The word Kama has a peculiar significance. It may mean lust and it may

mean an ardent introspective hope for final salvation. If Adityavarman had really mastered all the agamas and practised the self-control necessary for the purification of thoughts, which we do not doubt he did, he must have been one of the greatest Yogins of his age. When we talk of the Tantras and their practices we may well bear in our mind the cautions advocated by 'Mr. Avalon'. It is possible that Matangini was really a woman of the hill tribe but was married to an aryanised monarch of Palembang, which only leads to the conclusion that fusion with the indigenous element was never at an end in the Far East.

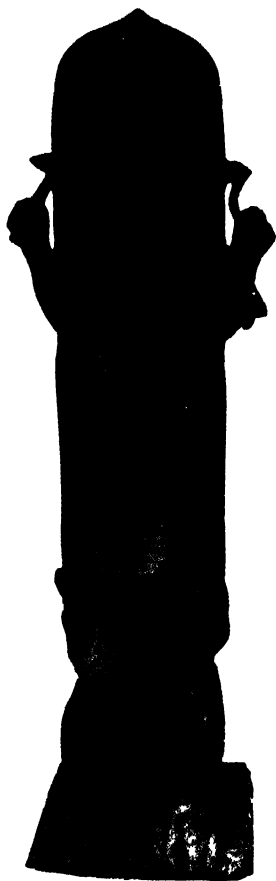
The Mahakalamurti marks the transition period, the waning of popular Buddhism, the slow installation of Buddhist devas among the Hindu Pantheon and the final emergence of the Hinduised Buddhism. The latter, too, finally disappears into all-embracing Aryan religion of India; but not before dual devataship such as the early conceptions of Siva-Buddha had their chance. The Lord of destruction is one of the members of the Hindu Trinity, but He represents the renunciation of material pleasure as well, an idea which the Lord Tathagata and Christ so eagerly advocated. The same cyclic conception of

life and death is represented by the skulls at the base of the Mahakala image which has the enigmatic smile of an ageless wisdom. Both the hands of the figure are well-amuleted and folded in yogic mudras, the head-gear is Buddhistic in appearance and it is very hard to say if the statue has the eyes closed or open. The attire is rather peculiar; the pyjama-like fold with a dangling end of the cummerband is rather suggestive of a non-Hindu inspiration. The face betrays Mongoloid features and the figure represents a stumpy human specimen, whereas the Matangini has the stature of a tall person. It almost tempts us to ask the scholars of eastern History, if Adityavarman married a lady of the Minangkabau race.

There are still some traces of pure Hinduism in Sumatra mostly in Padang country. The Rakshasa on the wall of the Biara Temple has rather a pleasant feature. Probably it really represents a dancing Yaksha with a mace (?) in one hand. The head shows beautiful curls of hair and the arms as well as ankles have ornaments. The cloth which hangs in a central pleat is secured to the waist by a jewelled belt. The temple itself is in a senile state, even the central dome has lost the spire. It stood on a square base and the whole architecture is remarkable in one sense

only; that is, the entire structure consists of burnt bricks cemented together closely while figures were cut into the brick with a sharp chisel, as were the figures on the walls of the Mi-Son palace in Champa. There is a fine murti, well-proportioned and carefully executed with minute details, placed outside the ruins of another Temple which has a too-suspiciously close appearance of a Buddha with upturned palms to be identified with a Hindu deity.

When we speak of political Sumatra of the olden times we mean the pre-Srivijaya kingdom and the Shilendra monarchy. Of the first, it is mostly guess-work. Leaving aside the vague references to Sumatra in the pre-Christ literature, we may be allowed to begin with Kantoli, which in itself would be speculative as to its geographical position. This kingdom of Kantoli is supposed to have sent beautiful presents to the Hsiau-Wu emperor, who in return created him an independent ruler with the title 'Sri Iswara Narendra'. This happened in 460 A.D. and forty-two years later, Gautama Subhadra, a successor to the Iswara Narendra, dreamt of the then Celestial Emperor on the 8th of April and so vivid was his dream that he had a picture of his overlord, drawn from the memory in the morning. The wonderful



Śiva—Srivijaya  
(By courtesy of Netherlands Indies  
Archæological Service)





point in the whole incident was that his court painter who was despatched post haste to the Chinese capital brought back an exact replica drawn from life. This clever adulation was perhaps appreciated by the Seigneur of China who probably compensated the envoys with the most valuable presents his empire could produce. Seventeen years later his son Priyavarman sent an epistle to the Chinese court, where his extreme piety as a Buddhist must have made a deep impression. Yet in less than half a century, in 564 A.D. to be precise, Kantoli vanishes into oblivion and for the first time we get to know the name of the Srivijaya.

We have already detailed, what we know regarding the visit of the Chinese scholar I-tsing, the conversion work of Dharmapala and the introduction of Tantrism by Wajrabodhi. But before the Javanese conquest of Sumatra, the Shailendras or the Mountain kings had already created an empire, which included the districts of Lower Siam, Malay, Sumatra and Java and if all the small islands are included, her possessions would number to fifteen different territories. Of course, the Shailendras did not consolidate the whole power under one central authority for long but upto the rise of the Banka revolt in the 7th century,

King Jayansa, whose gift of a park was commemorated in another inscription, must have held the reins of the whole of Srivijaya authority in one hand. But within a couple of centuries, probably owing to outside invasions, if not, due to internecine war, there appear to be three branches of the Shailendras, at least two, one with Java as the centre of his activities, the other with Palembang.

This split is indicated in the Pala Copper grant dug up at Nalanda in 1921. Hence we are at a loss to determine, unless the Chinese records specifically mention the 'country of origin', which branch of the Shailendras were responsible for gifts and envoys to the Imperial Court, when the common monarchical designations the 'Sri-vijayas' are spoken of. These friendly missions were never interrupted, except when serious troubles prevented their continuance. Thus from 671 to 741 A.D. we have proofs of this ambassadorial exchange of presents and it is on record that a Shailendra Yuvaraja visited the Imperial Court personally in 724 A.D. and was confirmed in the title of 'Sri Indravarman' after 17 years by the Emperor's proclamation.

The second half of the ninth century is commemorated by Balaputra's request of Devapaladeva to

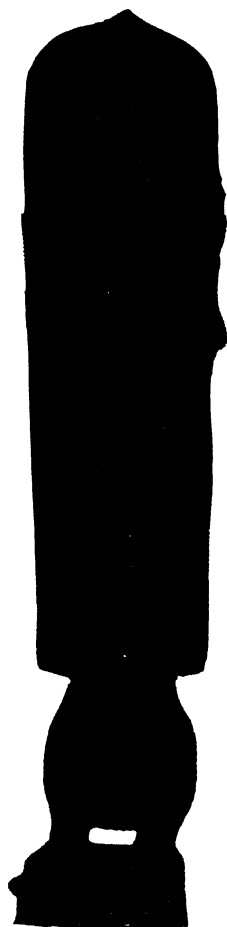
build a monastery in Nalanda. The Chinese mission resumed in the first decade of the 9th century, when according to Ibn-at-Fakih, Malay continued its government under the same banner as the island of Sumatra. All sorts of people used to flock to the Srivijaya ports which traded under royal control, camphor, sandal (Agastya himself preferred the Hari-chandana of the Indian Archipelago to that of the Dakshinapatha), ivory, aloes and sappan wood. Tin, ebony and spices perhaps made the bulk of the Srivijaya export to Europe, (the Near East), Arabia and India.

An envoy, probably an officer of the army of the Srivijaya received in 905 A.D. a high-sounding title from the head of the Tung dynasty. There is a record of the Si-li-wu-ya king sending in 960 and 962 A.D., gifts to the Imperial seat. The chamari tail (included in the list of Chinese presents), white porcelain, silver wares, silk thread, saddles and bridles, all display the height of splendour the Sumatran Court must have attained. The exchange of gifts was repeated in 971, 972 and 974 A.D. The presents that Srivijaya sent included ivory, rose water, dates, peaches, white sugar, glass phials and coral trees and most of these were the luxury articles the

wealthy Sumatrans used to enjoy. The cargo of perfumes and drugs which had to be taken to Canton owing to a storm in 980 A.D. tells us that the Hindu colonists must have learned the art of manufacturing the same from the mother country where according to Vatsayan there were some 74000 'Scent-articles' in vogue. These presents which went from Ha-chi (which may stand for some king Ajit or Raja Sri) were again repeated in 983 A.D. and this time the list included cotton cloth, crystal and rhinoceros horns.

Sanskrit culture seemed to have flourished more and more from the 11th century A.D. for Buddhist literature which was mainly in Pali was probably taught along with Sanskrit by scholars such as Pandit Wimalaseri to Chinese students like Fah Yu (963 A.D.). More books came to be composed in popular Sanskrit owing to the introduction of the Tantras.

The Sumatran Shailendras were the first to break away from the wide practice of employing Pallava script in books and petroglyphs. The Pallava types were so well known in Champa, Cambodia, Lower Siam, Malaya, Sumatra and Java, that the Chinese appellation for Further India was 'Kouen Louen'.



Brahma—Srivijaya  
(By courtesy of Netherlands Indies



The Sumatrans substituted Sanskrit as the court language for the common Proto-Malayan mixture of the Dravidianised Sanskrit (which in Dakshinapatha is called Tamil).

Of course neither they nor their Malayan cousins could build half as grand as the Javanese. The Stupas at Takoes Moeroes and at Tanjong Medan in the Padang highlands are some of the few extant architectural evidences they have still to their credit. Artistically they were far behind the Javanese people, but as rulers and conquerors they were perhaps more vigorous. By 775 A.D the Lower Siam was in their hands and this is proved by the word 'Srivijaya' being repeated three times in an inscription found there. In another hundred years, Malay was subjugated. They controlled all the trade of their territory. One of the Princes was in the habit of storing gold bricks in a tank near his palace saying each time he threw a brick "This is my treasury! Of course this probably is a tall story, the teller being a compatriot of the composer of the 'Arabian Nights'. But we know that the Sriwijaya in 848 A.D. was one of the richest maritime power, whose 'barbarous' Sanskrit of the Tantric inscriptions was probably intentional. It was an attempt to veil the double entendres which



the Tantric literature profusely used to ward off idle curiosity of the unbelievers; similar reasons prompted cabalistic writings of the Near East.

Possibly, the Arab colonists were primarily responsible for the introduction of wine and slave women among the elite of the Srivijaya and one of these traders deploras bitterly the absence of bucolic debauchery in countries like Cambodia.

The downfall of the Srivijaya was engineered by internal luxury and the royal indolence. Conscription at the time of war probably did not work according to the scheme drawn out during peaceful days. Petty jealousies, the want of proper control of distant possessions, the growth of competitive ports, and the reputed accumulation of gold, all were sowers of dissensions and disrapture. So long the Srivijaya monarchs could command a powerful navy, their thalassocracy was bound to prosper. There were really three different attacks all in different ages against the Srivijayas, who grew more and more discredited, while they were being shorn of their possessions. From the first two assaults which were neither systematic nor continuous, the Shailendras had time to recuperate but from the third they could hardly have enough resources left to revive their power.

Thus Srivijaya could not only repulse, but took offensive against their aggressors Dharmaswanga between (992-1007) A.D. and came out victorious. The years 1005-90 must have been prosperous to them. They could resume their relations with China but after 1035 A.D. Rajendra Chola I began to destroy the Srivijaya possessions piecemeal. But, even then, the Shailendras had a chance to regain at least some prestige and create a shadow of the former Srivijaya after the passing away of Rajendra Chola I and his successor.

It was Bilwa Tikta ruler with his queen-mother, his Prime Minister, Gaja Mada and Admiral Nala who did not allow any respite to the Srivijayas. Thus passed away a house of magnificent rulers who never levied heavy direct taxes, who always looked after the welfare of their people by not raising extravagant vain glorious monuments, but by solid commercial enterprises, the facilities of which were extended to all that traded in their ports.

## APPENDIX

Quite a number of bronze casts have been collected from Palembang and its environments from which the Hindu trinity appears to be in great evidence in the religious life of the ancient Sumatrans. Palembang was reputed to be the original home of the Shailendras. And these casts bear witness to the spirit of tolerance to all sects. There are at present very little materials which enable us to assign any particular date, to these figures, but it is probable that they are older than similar objects found in Java. In spite of the ravages of time the Sumatran figures display beautiful workmanship and even, if the technique was borrowed originally from India the Mongoloid features of three of them bespeak of the great adaptability of the Hinduised force under the Shailendras. These three figures, one of Siva, one of Vishnu and one of Brahma display certain peculiarities which are absent from the fourth, representing Siva. The last one has pronounced Aryan physiognomy; it is the figure of a

healthy Brahmin, whose Yajnopavita has taken the shape of an entwined snake—one of the special emblem of the Lord Siva, which however is not seen on its Sumatran counter-part. The head has an elaborate coiffure of plaited hair at the base of which there is a grand crown; the cords that tie the crown to the temple are flung on either shoulders like epaulettes. Broad shoulders add an unspeakable dignity to the figure. The nose, its trait and long eyes do not slant. From the ears hang large round rings, which touch the neck. Lips are locked in a benevolent, and not, enigmatic Buddhistic smile. Necklet adorns the upper chest above the Brahmanic cordon. Save for these ornaments there is no cover for the upper body, while lower part is draped in pleated cloth which reach the ankles. The four arms are all amuleted and have bracelets, while the palms have the usual emblems in their grip.

Like the Sumatran Siva this Aryan Siva has a girdle below the navel pit but the latter is much more elaborately clothed, while two of its hands fold across the chest in Yogic mudra. There is between two right arms a tuft of cloth purporting to be the Uttaria. Moreover all the three figures of the Sumatran trinity have a background, rectangular in shape but rounded

at top besides their usual divine carriers, which show that the Sumatrans closely conform to the Indian artistic canons. Except that these Bahanas are rather grotesque in appearance, nothing of distinction has attached itself to any of these figures.

That Tantrism was deeply rooted in all parts of Sumatra from the north to the south may be gathered from the recent findings of Dr. F. M. Schnitger during his excavations around the region of the Biara Temple. The various idols and statues indicate, the fact that this Tantrism of north Sumatra was of Buddhistic origin, but gradually merged into a degraded form of spirit-worship which bore hardly any resemblance to the philosophic preachings of the Aryan colonists of old.

*Oṃ Namaḥ Śivāya*



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